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ABSTRACT

A suggested plan for improving the training of teachers for urban schools includes inservice and on-the-job activities, with both apprentice teachers and experienced teachers involved. The plan, extending a full year, would require cooperation between a university or teacher education institution and one or more cooperating school systems. Each year's overall program would be geared to specific needs of the participating group. The program can be construed as a scrutiny of the field of English education, geared to the goal of preparing the teachers for instructional leadership within the urban area. Courses included in the program are The Practice of English Teaching, Sociology of (English) Teaching, Group Dynamics and Sensitivity Training, and Psychology of Adolescence. In addition to the courses, a number of elective workshops and seminars would be offered. Under this plan, the urban teacher participates in and plans a continuing process of education suited to his particular situation. (DB)

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RETRAIN TO RETAIN

SEQUENCE B-4 - Preparing Teachers for Special Educational Programs in the Inner City

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Retrain to Retain

There can be little doubt, if one spends a few weeks observing new teachers in our urban schools, that there are many inadequately prepared young people guiding our students today. The everchanging nature of our complex society requires much more from a teacher than ever before. What is today may not be tomorrow! What was yesterday often is not today! Dramatic, sometimes traumatic, shifts in stance, shaking traditional beliefs and values, are necessitated. I have always felt that English teachers were better equipped to make those changes than were other teachers, but I am not as sure of myself in that regard as I once was. A few years as a supervisor have altered that confidence. We can either despair or we can set our minds to the task and do something about it. I prefer the latter course.

One might consider the title of this talk and wonder at the choice of words. Poetic devices to the contrary, the words were carefully chosen for their intended connotations. Allow me to start with retain. Obviously, there are teachers whose retention only serves to compound the problems inherent in a special school program. On the other hand, many fine new teachers are lost because the diverse situations faced daily are just too overwhelming, too confusing, too frustrating to cope with. These are potentially good teachers who are inundated by problems which they were not prepared to handle, if not simply to comprehend. They are too busy with situations common to all new teachers, regardless of setting, to know what to do about those problems unique to their own peculiar setting or special program. They are salvageable and should be, must be, retained.

The psychological effect of staff stability or instability is obvious. A high faculty turnover, recurring as it often does in urban centers, annually, poses innumerable psychological drawbacks. Faculty members who remain become cynical, jaded, inept, careless, cliquish, or overburdened,

tired, disillusioned. New members tend to wonder at reasons for the turnover, seeking and finding answers where none exist. Students, certainly, question the professional and human factors which prompt this type of reaction by teachers. A one-third annual turnover, not considering the teachers who do not last the year -- the month -- week -- the day -- , is bound to have an adverse effect on student morale. Add the effect of all this on the community, and the school and all its special programs are in serious trouble.

Curriculum development and the continuity and sequence of extended programs and plans must indeed suffer when teachers are not retained. Every new program is new every year, and little or no feedback from prior experiences evolves. Last year's errors are repeated; sequence is lost; programs fail. Every effort to retain new teachers must be tried, and one of the most important of these centers around the first word of my title.

You will note that I chose <u>retrain</u> as opposed to <u>train</u>. I am a public school employee, and I assume that training occurs in teacher training institutions prior to my introduction to their graduates. If this were the case in all institutions, retraining would carry only one of the two connotations it now carries for me. We would be talking only of retraining the experienced teacher for new roles, which we will do later in this presentation. Unfortunately, we must look at another shade of meaning as well. Teachers do not arrive in urban schools prepared for the special needs and programs existing therein. They simply have not been trained for these special places. Indeed, the training they have received, oftentimes, is about as relevant as a 1970 course in teaching methods for the one-room school. Public school systems must end up retraining, sometimes after un-training, the new teacher in order to preserve the young person and his idealistic belief in the teaching profession. Of course, I am not referring to all teacher training institutions nor to all public school systems. Idealism suffers all too often in many urban settings. I am saying that retraining necessarily involves a group which should be excluded by virtue of its very

recent training -- the new teachers. It also includes another group whose needs are continuing -- the experienced teacher. The needs of and for these groups differ, but we in the public schools are faced with them.

What might be done, first of all, to improve the training of teachers for urban centers of learning? Because of time limitations I would like merely to suggest some alternatives to the present education courses currently taught in a vacuum. I will deal with various possibilities in pre-service, with some for first and second-year teachers, and with others for the teachers of experience. There will be some overlap in all cases.

Cooperation among state departments of public instruction, colleges, and school systems is an obvious necessity if training and certification are to improve. I would propose that the greatest number of courses in education be postgraduate in nature. Teacher certification would be contingent upon satisfactory completion of the courses when taken while teaching. It would seem that an apprentice teacher status might allow this. For the first two to four years the teacher would be given a tentative certification, and the probationary status would be removed not only with years of acceptable service but also with completion of certain coursework. While methods courses might continue as a requisite of undergraduate work, another, more meaningful methods course, taken while the student was a fulltime teacher, would have an immediacy that could be much more effective. This methods course, and ideally <u>all</u> methods courses, would be taught by a practicing, experienced teacher of proven ability not by the usual professor of education. All coursework for certification would be cooperatively planned and executed by the university, school, and central office personnel. Taking education courses out of their present vacuum would be a prime target, it seems to me, and they would become the initial stages of a planned system of continuing education for teachers of English. The very special and peculiar needs of teachers in special programs and special schools would become the very relevant education needed immediately, as opposed to the frantic, and often unsuccessful, stop-gap solutions practiced today.

To avoid the necessity for retraining new teachers, particularly in special situations and in multi-cultural centers, college students who express interest in possible career involvement of this type must be given opportunities very early and continuously in their college experience. Initially, tutorial work might be included as early as the freshman year. Community activities would also help. Later, some involvement in extra-curricular school groups and/or summer schools might be incorporated. All of these activities would be required and would contain conditions for follow-up study and discussion with college and school people including students, parents, and community. In addition, multi-cultural studies involving sociology, arts, and history would be taught in order to gain insights and understandings.

Retraining of both new and experienced teachers must include inservice and on-the-job activities. I separate these only because inservice implies an otherness to me while on-the-job states clearly that the training takes place in the schools, in the classroom, with the students -- on the job.

In a seminar in English education in 1969 at Harvard University Graduate School of Education, four of us students worked out a tentative plan for a continuing education program which we believed would serve many needs simultaneously. With modifications, it certainly serves the purposes we are considering here -- preparing teachers for special educational programs. Coupled with the preservice techniques mentioned earlier, I believe these ideas would further the cause of retraining to retain. The plan calls for a population of apprentice teachers and experienced teachers. This is an essential component in my opinion.

There is little doubt that the new teacher needs help; there should be less doubt that experienced teachers need help too, if only to re-evaluate self. A doctor who does no studying after internship would be an awesome, fearful creature indeed. Teachers, too, must refresh themselves and their methods.

New techniques and materials need to be studied and evaluated in the light of new situations, populations, generations. And the old ideas sometimes need only to be dusted off and re-evaluated and offered to the new practitioner. This plan, then, combines experience and inexperience, tradition and innovation, and inservice and on-the-job training. For the sake of brevity, I have eliminated many details, and I have made personal revisions, but the general tenor of the plan follows.

Extending a full year, the plan requires the articulation of a university or teacher education institution and one or more cooperating school systems. The staff and facilities of both agencies would be utilized in all phases of the program, in planning, recruitment, financing, and teaching. Students -- and may I remind you this means "teachers currently practicing" -- for this curriculum are intended to be both those who have taught for some time and those new to the classroom, but not student teachers. In most courses, the experienced and new teachers would be mixed; in all, they would be accorded the same status. Stressing flexibility, the program would provide opportunities during the year for student participation in course planning and selection to balance a core of experiences deemed necessary for all. It would be possible for each student's program, therefore, to be individualized, and for each year's overall program to be peculiar to the expressed and felt needs of the participating group -- such group being more specific in locale than "the city." Rather it should be an individual sector -- "a community" within the urban sprawl.

Specifically and purposely grounded in practice, the plan requires, however, that the experienced teachers conduct two English classes first semester which would be taught, in turn, by the new teachers in the second semester. Anticipating that the course participants might have a circumscribed and only partly valid view of English instruction, the curriculum intends to define a set of broader limits, going beyond these teachers' present experiences. It includes,

therefore, many direct encounters with a variety of materials, methods, and media; extensive training in critical evaluation of practices and self; and numerous individually-devised projects grounded in the peculiar needs of the immediate community at hand. Combined, these could be the source of practical, as well as daring, ideas for English classrooms and would foster the belief that the search for and employment of alternatives in methods and materials is a necessary and never-ending process for the effective teacher of English. The plan intends to help teachers to make wise choices from among a range of alternatives, to make reasonable decisions when aware of the facts, and to give direction to issues when in control of the arguments.

This program can be construed, therefore, as an informed scrutiny of the field of English education geared to the ultimate goal of preparing a cadre for instructional leadership and for fundamental change but serving some more immediate ends as well -- particularly the leadership needed, in this instance, within the urban area.

An outline of program experiences includes these courses:

I. Classrooms and Courses: The Practice of English Teaching (full year)

   A. An Initial Experience in Writing

   B. Problems in the English Curriculum

   C. Classroom Observation (concurrent with B)

II. Sociology of (English) Teaching (full year)

   A. Seminar

   B. Field Work and Independent Reading

III. Group Dynamics and Sensitivity Training (one semester)

IV. Psychology of Adolescence (one semester)

V. Elective Workshops and Seminars (variable length, either semester)

Several choices -- possibility of picking up others in another year

A. The Community

B. Audio Visual Technology

C. New Teaching Materials -- films, tapes, games, units, texts

D. Creative Writing

E. Music, Art, and Dance

F. Drama

G. Student and Professional Publications

H. Photography

I. Film as an Art Form

J. Readings in Literature

K. Readings in Philosophy

L. Critics of Education

The Experience in Writing course involves turning the teachers into students with the idea that the experience could serve as a model for teaching composition. The papers are kept short and are all interrelated, as are class discussions, with attention focused on describing and analyzing familiar skills, experiences, activities. Basic problems in language use become the real work of the course.

In Problems in the English Curriculum a wide range of topics would be studied and discussed including the very nature of the discipline called English. A representative list of items for study include questions like these:

1. What aspects of popular culture belong to the English curriculum?
2. What stance does the English teacher take toward grammar study?
3. On what basis can selection of literary materials be made?
4. What range of response is appropriate to study composition?
5. To what extent is oral language the special business of the English Class?

In the end students return to the initial question, "What is English?," with new insights and new learnings. Throughout this course students (who are actually new and experienced teachers, remember) are given many tasks to perform, all of which serve as models of teaching/learning. Indeed, the entire range of experiences in this plan should serve as a model of the variety of methods available to teachers.

The phase called Classroom Observation would involve observation at all levels, K-12, in all subjects (regardless of the student's interest and/or level). Arrangements would be made to follow some teachers for an entire day. At least one observation would be made in the company of an experienced observer.

Once a week during the period of observation (requiring approximately eight hours a week) students would meet in seminar groups to compare and discuss observations and observational technique. Various methods would be analyzed and tried with emphasis on effectiveness. Conclusions based on these observations would be examined, and students would consider possible recommendations and the consequences of those recommendations.

Each student would devise a self-analysis guide to be tried when he is actually teaching. After criticizing and refining these guides, self-supervision would result.

The Sociology of English Teaching is proposed as a seminar centering attention on professionalism in America, with the schools in particular, and on the evolution of English as a school subject. The seminar would be followed by field work and independent reading with consequent reports representing individual conclusions. The field study would concern itself with English teachers and English teaching, particularly as related to this community -- this school -- this special program -- the one in which I teach.

Lastly, the program includes a realistic look at the Psychology of Adolescence, again not in the sterile surroundings of a university classroom.

but within the proximity of those it purports to study. A real understanding of the adolescent is essential to the efforts of the English teacher. To this purpose, the teacher group would be involved in a study seminar on psychology of adolescence. The seminar would involve meetings every three or four weeks to discuss and relate the readings currently under consideration, and to present papers on current topics (campus problems, SDS, student activism, the student in my community, my school, my classroom). The bibliography for this course would include works of fiction as well as of recognized authorities on the subject.

No one would pretend that such a program would be a panacea, but it would be a beginning. Communication would be established; common goals and concerns would become viable school-community concerns; and the door would be opened to further efforts in the continuing education of teachers of English.

I would hope that the sensitivity sessions would expand and continue to include other members of the school community -- administrators, students, parents and that the way would be cleared for other obviously necessary inservice/ on-the-job activities.

These might include:

-- Further workshops involving students and community

-- Curriculum Development with released time and specialist support built in

-- Special courses to meet needs currently ignored

1. Junior high school-middle school problems -- efforts to establish and realize their unique character
2. Ethnic literature and cultures
3. Peculiar communication problems and solutions

-- Time to

view demonstration teaching, to observe other teachers, schools, systems, to attend conferences, to experiment with new materials, and to develop new methods and materials.

-- Increased use of videotape and its effective use in micro-teaching, self-supervision, and so forth.

Throughout all of this run several threads, and the most predominant is the requisite combination of preservice training with on-the-job training. Instead of the rather isolated segments of the training process so evident in the past, there should be a continuity and a continuum running throughout a career -- from the first efforts as an undergraduate to retirement. A development of and constant concern for empathy, openness to the views of others -- in a word -- sensitivity -- permeate this continuing education of English teachers. Apprentice teachers get to teach and learn under the tutelage and guidance of practitioners while their own evolving ideas are treated with respect and honor. Also, all students -- remember, this means the fledgling and the teacher with several years of experience -- all students receive a great deal of latitude in planning their own education to satisfy their own needs. As in all of this, the urban teacher accrues gains formerly unavailable; he participates in and plans a continuing process of education suited to his own peculiar situation; he continues to learn; and he uses all the resources available to him -- the school, the university, and the community.

While this is all admittedly idealistic, it is grounded in practical possibilities and segments can be implemented immediately. Indeed, some of this type of thing exists already. To ready new teachers adequately and to assist experienced teachers in adjusting to new challenges, we must launch a cooperative attack based on realistic principles. All differences must be set aside in the interest of the students involved, and professionalism must replace pettiness at all levels and across all levels. We must train, retrain, and retain.